



# LA Galaxy Media Conference

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**Greg Vanney**

Press Conference

LA Galaxy 2, FC Dallas 1

*Q. Your thoughts on the game --*

**GREG VANNEY:** In general, pretty well-played, pretty controlled. You like to be up by more than one if you can in that type of scenario. We knew coming in at the half that at some point they were going to push it.

We talked about at the half, my guess was they were going to come back in a four, some kind of a 4-4-1 or something and try to extend a little bit and see if they can get back in the game.

I thought we -- in the second half, I thought at times we were just impatient, and then making like runs and leaving positions that we needed to stay in, control the game, control the transitions.

Obviously we give up a goal. I have to see it because I was a little confused on how we got so pulled apart. We give up a goal, and then I think the mindset kicks in where you're up a man, and the feeling is, like, you can't draw a game when you're up a man for that long. You have to win.

And I felt like we got really impatient. Guys were just running. You know, just running, and they end up building because now at 1-1, they are probably in a reasonable spot. They build a wall of five, six guys in the back line.

Again we have guys, we are kind of just running aimlessly at times, and we are not where we need to be when the opportunity comes to try to break them and to try to create that final moment and it ends up in a transition. And because we are running we lose track of where they are transition players are, where our control spots are.

And so we saw some fuzzy transitions that we had to deal with and Emiro having to use his speed to deal with a couple on one or two. I felt we got a little bit impatient in ways and took ourselves out of important positions that we needed to just control the game in their half of the field and play our way.

But we tried some different things to get a left-footed crosser on the field. So we were trying to get John at times into high positions. Then we came on with Tucker to keep John into transition positions because Sarver was hanging out waiting to transition so we wanted to keep John in control.

So we were trying to get bodies in front the goal with two strikers. We were trying to do different things to deal with the numbers they had behind the ball, and especially on the back line.

So credit to the guys. Found a way to put it in the back of the net, and it became harder than we would have liked it to be. But you know when you have a team that's playing for their playoff lives, it's never going to be easy. They are going to throw



it at you at some point.

*Q. We have talked about Elijah and his progression from the beginning of this year to now. What did you see from him on that goal, and did you give him maybe a little extra go-forward juice tonight?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yeah, we used him differently tonight. We set up in a 4-3-3 and told him to stay at that times, especially in the attacking half of the field, almost like a second forward.

When they committed five in the back, we felt like we would commit at least two forwards into the situation. He was staying in some higher positions with a green light to break the line, to run through, yeah, to try to get into dangerous positions.

And so I thought he found some really good moments. At times he was trying to feel out his positioning but especially in the couple transition moments and a couple others, I thought he was in really good spots for the guys to play off him or play with him but also for he himself to find some good spots. Good finish, because the keeper came out pretty quickly, and I'm not sure he knew exactly how close the keeper was. But he was able to get it under him.

Again, I thought he had a really strong match, again, in a slightly different type of role than the double-pivot. We used him a higher player today. We used his size a little higher in front and around the goal. I think, again, he's coming along, right. Especially playing for me, sometimes you get asked to do different roles than you did from the game before. You know, today I thought he did a nice job of adapting into the role.

*Q. If you had a list of guys who have taken the biggest jump this season, would it be Elijah, throughout the season from start to now?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Maybe. That's probably fair. He came in with some experience at the USL level, I think, early on. Again, actually functioning like in a system versus functioning with freedom on the field was something that he was trying to wrap his head around early on. And then I think he grasped it.

Other guys have come along this season. Mauri has come along and another step for him. Obviously guys like Harbor have come along and big steps for guys without that experience.

But yeah, you definitely have to put Elijah up in that category of guys who have utilized this season in a positive way to move themselves forward to be ready for what's to come.

*Q. The game sort of started as like a free-for-all. There weren't many fouls called early and you get the red card. Did that sort of change how you approached the game, how the guys approached the game at all?*

**GREG VANNEY:** I don't know if it changed a ton the way we approached the game. I think because they didn't change a lot other than they dropped -- instead of playing with kind of two forwards, or more of a 4 -- whatever you want to call it, a 5-2-3, they ended up in a little bit more of a 5-3-1. It became harder for them to get out of their half of the field.

It didn't change our setup at all because we were working against a 5 and we were trying to set up with a little bit extra numbers higher up the field.

Again, in the first half I thought we were good about our positional play. It was just about timing, about execution. It was about things like that. We managed a lot of the transition moments a lot cleaner in the first half than we did in the second half. But I do agree that the start of the game was a little hectic and it was physical and it was -- free-for-all could be a word.

I mean, the red card is probably a red card because it's after the play and off the ball. I didn't see it specifically. But I felt like it kind of came out of nowhere in terms of what had been called up until this point.

But when you act out, then you run the risk of that, I guess. Again, I didn't see the whole play, so I don't have an opinion on it.

Yeah, the game -- Jair let's the game play. He's never going to be one that's going to overblow the whistle, and then you have a team that's fighting for their playoff life; and for us, we are fight to go move up that table a couple spots if we can.



So you get a highly competitive game.

*Q. Speaking about that table, you guys climbed up to 28th tonight overall. You have an ability to get up to 25th. You definitely will finish ahead of either Atlanta or D.C., possibly both. But you have to win this week to escape the western cellar. Just your thoughts on all of this.*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yeah, I mean, it's where we are.

Again, the first 16 games or so put us in a really challenging spot. I actually think the second half of our season has been a lot more stable. We, in terms of league play, have been fairly stable. Haven't done much on the road, which you've got to do something on the road. We haven't done anything, really, on the road.

But the second half of the season, including Leagues Cup run and including those games, we've been more stable. And outside of the road play, probably would be talking about a playoff spot if we were more consistent with that over 34 games. But when you don't get a win in like the first 16, you put yourself in a really difficult position.

Yeah, so I mean, our position is our position. It hasn't changed a ton in the last long time. So I think for us down the stretch, to finish the season as we talked about, to finish with strong character, work hard, compete for every point out there, and yeah, we're playing a team that was battling for playoffs and a team that would be in the playoffs.

So it's a good statement to be able to say that you can come away with big results against two teams that are right in there in the mix.

*Q. Would that be a talking point going into this game that, hey, Minnesota, we don't finish last?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yeah, we've talked about it all week. Legacy is legacy. When you win a championship, that's legacy. When you finish at the bottom, that's also a legacy that you don't want.

I don't know what matters, if it's the Western Conference or the table or whatever, but I know that I don't want to be at the bottom of anything. The intention to be had come out and to compete to win against a team that is going to be preparing themselves for the playoffs.

And because it's coming off an international break and they have been off for two weeks, I would expect them to really use our game as a preparation for what's coming for the playoffs.

So it's going to be a really tough game.

*Q. You just touched on it a little bit but one more game to close out the year next week. We've got Minnesota. They are coming into town, like you mentioned, before they start their playoff run. You touched a little bit also on the road play. I was at St. Paul when you had one of your better performances with 2-2 draw but that feels forever ago at this point. Any changes in the approach this time around?*

**GREG VANNEY:** I have to look at them again to be honest because we haven't seen them in a while. See if they are doing anything different.

Again, depending on our availability, who we have over the next week, if anything changes, that may or may not play into that.

But what we know is they are a team that doesn't need to have a ton of possession. They are a team that going to be really difficult to break down. They will probably be sitting in a low block, and they are very, very good in the transition. And they are not incompetent in possession, but it's not something that they fancy as being too important to them.

It's going to be like tonight, when you have a fair amount of the ball, you have to remain disciplined to your positions behind the ball and not go running forward for no reason because they have a ton of ability in the transition. You have to maintain



your control positions, and you have to make sure everything is accounted for, underneath and behind attacks, and we're going to have been really good at that.

But I haven't looked at them closely enough to give you much of an answer on that.

*Q. We saw Mauricio in an advance position today. Can you talk to us a little bit about his versatility and what he brings to the lineup, being able to line up there or in defense?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yeah, it's a little bit necessity, and you've seen Harbor do that over the last couple of weeks, who is also not really a winger. But they are natural wide players, I would say. So guys who are comfortable on the sideline or thinking about running in behind, trying to get into good positions, thinking about playing off the line.

He's played some winger for us last year on occasion. He knows what he's doing. It's not probably his natural position.

But given the group that we have, not having a Joe, not having, really, another true winger out there, especially if we use Diego on the inside, then you know, those guys give us some flexibility that also at times we can drop into a five if we need to by using a fullback.

I think at times it gives us a little flexibility but also gives us guy who is understand how to play on the you outsides. A lot of our guys are more central in terms of -- we had three center backs on the bench.

So we had a lot of guys who probably wouldn't be playing that position otherwise. It allowed us to stay in our shape and do some things that had been similar.

But I thought he did a good job. Again, I think it's not his natural position. I thought in the first half he had some really good actions, good timings. He got to the inline once and he crossed with his left foot.

Otherwise I thought he more wanted to cut back on his right foot and try to work off of that, and I felt like at times we needed to try to get deeper and put a left-footed ball in behind. That's why we were rotating him and John a little bit and who was taking the higher, wider position. He's done a good job.

Tonight, like Elijah, just had a different role that we asked him to do and some of it is out of necessity, and some of it is to create some flexibility for us out there in the game.

*Q. I've asked you a couple times about Diego about what he does for the team. As he sits on 79-79 and the team approaches its last game, is that a focus at all? Is the team looking to feed Diego a little bit more in the last game and see if you guys can get him to 80-80?*

**GREG VANNEY:** I wish we had that luxury to be able to say that. Last year, I would say we would be looking to do something like that. But this year, I think we are trying to put the ball in the back of the net as much as we can.

I think everybody is mindful of it and everybody wants him to achieve it. And you know, you never know, if we have a penalty or if we have a free kick from outside, he may be the guy who steps up in that type of situation.

But I think in the run of play, guys are just trying to solve the moment and find the best solution.

But his -- I mean, he's done so many different things for us over the course of the season, playing different positions. Yeah, he's been a leader for our group. He's played a ton of minutes. He's the guy in the locker room that just connects everybody. He's a valuable, valuable human being in the locker room, but also on the field just allowing us to do some things.

I've said this before and I'll say it again: I thought in midseason our group settled and became a little bit more of ourselves when he became the second pivot next to Eddie and Marco was in front of them, and then Naschi, Joe and Gab; that combination of guys, when they were together, is when I thought we were on our best run for the season.

I thought the connection amongst them was smooth and it was good. And it allowed some time for Elijah and some of the



others to not be forced -- not be forced into roles but give them time to see how it should function and allow them to grow in it.

Even talking to Elijah, he felt like he benefitted to be able to see that a little bit and understanding better what his role would look like.

*Q. Like you said, the options were limited, guys available. You had three center backs on the bench. Any thoughts of using any of them?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Thought about it. I mean, it's a tough one because it's a game where you're up a man. So the need for another center back, unless you take a center back off, doesn't really, unless you put Maya as a forward, which we're not afraid to do.

But it wasn't -- it's not a game that for me felt like we needed to add a center back, per se. Should we take one off? We immediate Emiro's speed in transition. We saw that. And Maya's ability on set pieces to win something in the air and do something is important for us.

So yeah, I mean, I'm over there thinking through how I can use anyone and everyone in some of these situations, and sometimes it's trying to fit a square peg in a round hole sometimes because it's not like-for-like, and so we are trying to work through some of that constantly.

*Q. Do you expect Julian back next week?*

**GREG VANNEY:** It's possible. We'll see how he progresses. Christian is getting a little closer. I don't know where Marco will be but I'm not fancying that he will be quite ready or the risk will be worth the award.

But Julian might be ready. It's more he tweaked his ankle and he keeps aggravating it, and we'll see if we feel like he's far enough along.

*Q. On that center back thinking and all that, I mean, not necessarily this game, because you didn't need it, but any thoughts to three center backs and then two wingbacks?*

**GREG VANNEY:** Yes. We've done versions of that over the course of the season.

Sometimes I'll do it using a fullback in that help position. Because if I think we don't really want to have three guys or five guys defending like that or if we don't want to have three guys in the build, then having a fullback in that type of role gives you flexibility to change into a four if that's something you want to do.

You've seen over the last several weeks using Harbor in that type of role, it's almost like playing five in the back. It's just a matter of when we were in pressing positions, he was defending higher off the back line, and when we were in lower positions, he was more in the back line.

So, again, there's a method to the madness. It kind of looks like it but it's not five all the time.

I don't -- yeah, when we have Joe and Gab -- it's interesting because Gab is a winger. Joe can do a little bit but Gab is probably most comfortable coming in off the wing. So I also think about how it impacts the other guys that are in the group, as well.

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